

On the face of It



Susan Hill

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Hill (born on 5th February in 1942) is an English author of fiction and non-fiction works. Her novels include *The Woman in Black*, *The Mist in the Mirror* and *I'm the King of the Castle* for which she received the Somerset Maugham Award in 1971. She had to undergo tragedy early in life. In her semi-autobiographical novel, *In The Springtime of the Year* 1974, she deals with loneliness and isolation as is experienced by Mr Lamb and Derek in the play, *On the Face of It*.

INTRODUCTION

The play depicts a unique bond between a fourteen-year-old boy Derry and an old man Mr. Lamb. Both of them are physically impaired. Derry's one side of the face is burnt with acid whereas Mr. Lamb has got a tin leg because his real leg was blown off in war. Derry is withdrawn and he does not like being near people. Mr. Lamb tells him that being secluded is not a solution to his problem. Mr. Lamb makes Derry aware of the reality of life and encourages him in every way how he can cope with his impairment in the best possible manner.

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

It is a fine day and Mr. Lamb is in his garden. He is an old man with a tin leg. He leads a lonely life and is always ready to accept any visitor who

comes in his garden. One day Derry, a young boy of fourteen, sneaks into Mr. Lamb's garden. He has a burnt face with acid so he looks very ugly. He has become defiant and withdrawn due to his disfigured face. He does not want to face the world with his ugly and disfigured face.

Derry climbs over the wall and cautiously walks through the long grass. He is quite close to Lamb. He is scared when Lamb speaks to him. Lamb asks him to tread carefully because the long grass is littered with wild apples dropped by wind. Derry is utterly confused as he has come there considering the place empty. Having been detected by Lamb, Derry panics and wants to go. Lamb asks him not to leave as he does not mind anybody's coming into his garden. He keeps the gate always open. He advises entering through the gate rather than by climbing over the garden wall. Lamb tells that all who come to his garden are welcome. But Derry says that he has not come to steal but he wants only to come into the garden. He rather tells Derry not to be afraid of anything but Derry points out that the people are afraid of him because of his ugly and disfigured face. Derry adds that he is afraid of himself when he sees his face in the mirror.

Lamb tries to console him. He asks him to face the harsh realities of life bravely. He tries to divert the views of Derry from his burnt face to the fruits in the garden, but Derry keeps on talking about his ugly face. Lamb tries to make

him understand that it is the inner beauty of a person that matters, not his outer beauty. Derry does not agree to it. He tells Lamb that it is important to be handsome from outside also. He says that even his mother kisses him on the other side of his face. He says that he has to spend the whole of his life with his half face. Mr. Lamb points out that there is no difference between a flower plant and a weed since both are living and growing plants. Derry remarks that Mr. Lamb can put on trousers and cover up his tin-leg. Then Mr. Lamb reminds Derry of a fairy tale of Beauty and The Beast in which the princess kisses the Beast who in turn changes into a handsome prince. This makes Derry understand that ugliness is only skin deep. A man is not what he looks like but what he really is. Handsome is that handsome does. This story is to inspire Derry and he should not care for his burnt face. But Derry tells that people stare at his face and they are afraid of him.

Derry tells Lamb that women talk of his ugly face. They say that none will kiss except his mother. Mr. Lamb tells him that he must have heard so many other things also. The best thing is to keep his ears shut and not pay attention to such talks. Mr. Lamb talks about the bees in his garden. Some people like their buzzing while others hate it. But Lamb calls it sweet music. It is only the difference of attitude.

Derry tells that people stare at his face so he avoids them. But Mr. Lamb says that keeping alone is not a fine thing.

He tells a story about a man who was always afraid of being run over or getting infected or meeting with some accident. So he locked himself in a room. There a picture fell on his head and killed him.

Derry says that his family often talks about him downstairs when he is not there. They are worried about what is going to happen to him when they are gone and how he will get on in this world. Mr. Lamb does not agree with him. Lamb encourages him that he has got two arms, legs, eyes, ears, a tongue and a brain. He can achieve whatever he likes. He can be better than others. He tells Derry that he has got a full body. He can do anything like other people or may do better than others. He asks Lamb several questions to know more about him. Mr. Lamb says that he sits in the sun and reads books. He likes the windows open to hear the wind. Lamb says that he has a lot of friends everywhere. Everybody who comes to his garden is his friend. Derry wonders how a person can be his friend about whom he knows nothing. Derry says that there are some people he hates. But Lamb remarks that hatred would do him more harm than any bottle of acid. Acid only burns our face or so but hatred can burn us away inside.

Lamb asks him to be a friend. Derry asks how they can be friends only in one meeting. But Lamb tells him that he can come there at any time even if he is out. Derry thinks of helping him. He tells Lamb that with one leg he can fall off a ladder and die. Derry offers

to help him but he wants to inform his mother where he is since she will be worried. Lamb doubts if he will come back. Derry assures him to return but Lamb says to himself that people never come back though they say that they will come back. Derry goes back to his house and tells everything to his mother. Derry says that he wants to go there, sit and listen to things and look. Nobody else has ever said the things the old man has said. His mother stops him from going to the old man's house. She says that she has heard strange stories about the old man. She urges him not to go there again. Derry insists that he must go there otherwise he will never go anywhere in this world. In spite of his mother's strong resistance, Derry slams the door and runs away to help Lamb in collecting crab apples. In the meantime Mr. Lamb climbs on the ladder for the apples. The ladder falls back and Mr. Lamb is killed. Derry opens the gate and says excitedly that he has come back. Suddenly he catches sight of Mr. Lamb. He runs through the long grass and says, "I came back Lamey Lamb. I did come back." But there was no response. Derry kneels by him and weeps and realises that he has lost his only friend in this world.



1. Mr. Lamb is sitting all alone in his garden.
2. Suddenly Derry entered the garden thinking no one was inside the house.
3. Derry is scared to see Mr. Lamb sitting in the garden.
4. Mr. Lamb told him that his gates were always open for all people. Mr. Lamb assured him, that he could stay there if he wanted to sit
5. Mr. Lamb assured him that he could stay there if he wanted to sit there.
6. Derry told him that people were afraid of his burnt face and hated him.
7. Mr. Lamb convinced him that both of them were similar as both of them faced a disability.
8. Mr. Lamb also told him that he should not bother about what others say.
9. Derry was impressed by the positive thoughts of Mr. Lamb.
10. Gradually Derry was able to realise that he too was better than people
11. He decided to go home, informed his mother and came back to help Mr. Lamb.
12. When Derry came back he was shocked to see that Mr. Lamb had fallen from the ladder and had bled to death.

IMPORTANT WORD NOTES

WORDS	MEANINGS
Rustling	Sound when tree leaves move
Walk tentatively	Walk aimlessly or hesitantly
Startled	surprised
Lad	boy
Weed	Unwanted grass
Blown off	cut in a bomb blast
Monstrous	horrible
Dribble	Water coming out of mouth
Whispered	Spoke in low voice
Peculiar	Strange
Hive	House of bees
Trespassing	Entering without permission
Swish	Move quickly in air with a sound
Signify	To be important
Make out	Assess
To make fuss	worry or get angry without cause
Dafy	mad
Thump	Sound of falling
Creak	Sound of bending

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

- Who has written On The Face Of It?
 - Susan Hill
 - William Sydne
 - Salman Rushdie
 - Chetan Bhagat
 - A) Susan Hill**
- Who is Mr. Lamb?
 - a young man
 - a middle aged man
 - an old man
 - none
 - C) an old man**
- What were Derry and Mr. Lamb victims of?
 - vision impairment
 - Physical impairment

- C) war
- D) none
- B) Physical impairment**
4. Why did Mr. Lamb help Derry?
- A) because both were victims of war
- B) both were sad
- C) both were victims of physical impairment
- D) because he wanted Derry to change his view of life.
- D) because he wanted Derry to change his view of life.**
5. Who is Derry?
- A) A boy of 14 and has an acid burn on his face
- B) a small boy
- C) a boy
- D) a young boy
- A) A boy of 14 and has an acid burn on his face**
6. How does Mr. Lamb keep himself busy?
- A) by reading books
- B) by chatting with people
- C) by pulling down the ripe crab apples of his garden
- D) All of these
- D) All of these**
7. How did Derry enter the garden?
- A) from the front gate
- B) from the side gate
- C) from back gate
- D) by climbing the garden wall
- D) by climbing the garden wall**
8. Why did Mr. Lamb keep the door of his garden open?
- A) to keep an eye over his garden
- B) to be safe
- C) to chat with the people and the children who come there to take fruit
- D) none
- C) to chat with the people and the children who come there to take fruit**
9. Why did children call Mr. Lamb 'Lamey Lamb'?
- A) because he stopped them from taking apples
- B) he spoke rudely
- C) they didn't like him
- D) because of his broken leg in a bomb explosion
- D) because of his broken leg**

in a bomb explosion

10. Why didn't Mr. Lamb feel hurt by children's comments?

A) because he thought that it suits him

B) he loves children

C) he likes them

D) he want them to play in his garden

A) because he thought that it suits him

11. What does Mr. Lamb grow in his garden?

A) cherry

B) peach

C) pomegranate

D) apples

D) apples

12. How did Mr. Lamb pick apples?

A) bending down

B) with the help of his servant

C) with the help of children

D) using a ladder and a stick

D) using a ladder and a stick

13. Why did Derry go to Mr. Lamb at the end?

A) because of his wish to live a free life

B) he wanted apples

C) he wanted to play in the garden

D) none

A) because of his wish to live a free life

14. Why did Derry's mother stop him from staying with Mr. Lamb?

A) because he was not well

B) because he would scold him

C) because he talked too much

D) because she didn't want him to stay with a stranger

D) because she didn't want him to stay with a stranger

15. How did Mr. Lamb help Derry?

A) by giving him apples

B) by talking to him

C) by helping his mother

D) by giving him a positive outlook towards life

D) by giving him a positive outlook towards life

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

1. What is the attitude of Mr Lamb to the small boy who comes to his garden ?

Ans : Mr Lamb's attitude to the small boy is quite gentle, protective and accommodating. Like an elder in the family offering advice and instructions to the younger members, Mr Lamb advises the young boy to mind the apples lest he should trip. He also advises the boy not to feel afraid.

2. What explanation does the small boy offer for coming into the garden? How does Mr Lamb react to it?

Ans : The boy thought that this was an empty place. He did not know there was anybody there. Mr Lamb assures him that it is all right. He asks the boy what he is afraid of. He tells the boy that the house is empty as he is in the garden and is likely to stay there. Such a beautiful day should not be wasted indoors.

3. Why, according to Derry, has the old man changed the subject?

Ans : Derry says that people always change the subject. They don't ask him about his physical impairment. They simply pretend that it is not true and isn't there. They don't want the boy to mind and get upset. He thinks that the old man has changed the subject because he is afraid to ask him about his burnt face.

4. "We're not the same", says Derry. How does Mr Lamb try to convince him that there is no essential difference between them?

Ans : Derry and Mr Lamb are both of the same species. They represent various

stages of growth. Derry is young, Mr Lamb is old. Both suffer from the same physical impairment. Derry has a burnt face. The old man has got a tin leg. But this physical disability is not important. What is important is that both are alive. Derry is standing there whereas Mr Lamb is sitting.

5. How does Mr Lamb try to remove the baseless fears of Derry?

Ans : Derry has developed withdrawal symptoms. He doesn't like being near people. Mr Lamb tells him the story of a person who was afraid of everything in the world. So he went into his room and locked the door. He got into his bed and stayed there for a while. Then a picture fell off the wall onto his head and killed him.

6. In what ways does Mr Lamb inspire Derry to overcome his physical disability?

Ans : Mr Lamb tells Derry that he 'has got two arms, two legs and eyes and ears. He has got a tongue and a brain. He will get on the way he wants, like all the rest. And if he chooses and sets his mind to it, he could get on even better than all the rest.

7. Why does Derry's mother oppose his going back to the old man's garden?

Ans : Derry's mother tells him that she has heard things about the old man. In fact, she has been warned. Though they have lived there for three months, she knows what is worth knowing and Derry is not to go back there.

8. What makes Derry resolve to go to the old man?

Ans : He no longer cares about his face and looks. He is more concerned with what he thinks and feels, what he wants to see and find out and hear. He knows that if he does not go back there, he will never go anywhere in that world again. He wants the world. He no longer shuns it or avoids the people.

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

1. Justify the title 'On the Face of It'.

Ans : The title of the story 'On the Face of It' seems to be very appropriate. The idiom 'On the Face of It' means from appearance alone or apparently. In the play, Derry is frustrated and has lost self-esteem due to the others' attitude towards him. Everyone thought that his burnt face was terrible and he was handicapped. Similar was the case of Mr Lamb. He lost his one leg in a bomb explosion. Apparently – both Mr Lamb and Derry had the deformity. But Mr Lamb enabled Derry to have faith in himself and look at the bright side of things and to learn to live with it. Their physical handicap was an apparent thing for them as well as for the world. But the most significant thing is the strength of one's soul. Mr Lamb was a mentally strong person who handled

his own handicap and loneliness very nicely. He became instrumental in making Derry change his views about himself and his deformity and started taking things positively. The chapter deals with the acceptance of the fact that it is not always the same as it appears. Physical handicap has nothing to do with mental strength and positive attitude towards life.

2. What efforts does Mr Lamb make to strike up a friendship with Derry, the small boy, who enters his garden ?

Ans : Mr Lamb is quite gentle, accommodating and protective. He asks Derry to mind the apples as he might trip. Instead of feeling angry over the way of his entry, he points out that the gate is always open and he is welcome. His cordial manner and conciliatory tone touch the innermost chords of a defiant boy like Derry who does not want to mix up with others. On learning about his burnt face, he does not react like others. Instead of exhibiting fear and revulsion, he shows understanding and affection. He admits that he is the same as the boy. If the boy has a burnt face, he has got a tin leg. Gradually, he tries to win over the confidence of Derry by reminding him of 'Beauty and the Beast'. He then tells him the story of a man who feared everything and shut himself in a room. His positive attitude towards life inspires the boy to talk to him like a friend.